

DRAFT

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BARBOUR: HOUSING PROGRAMS TAKE MAJOR STEP FORWARD

(JACKSON, Mississippi) – Two post-Katrina programs designed to help restore housing on the Mississippi Gulf Coast have taken a major step forward, Governor Haley Barbour said today.

By clearing environmental review, as required by federal law, the Small Rental Assistance Program and Elevation Grant program have moved to a federally-mandated public comment period, which ends Feb. 8. The Governor expects the Mississippi Development Authority to begin mailing grant packages and scheduling appointments for eligible applicants in the Small Rental program in February, and to write the first project funding checks in March.

“This is another major step forward for our ongoing hurricane recovery and rebuilding efforts, particularly in the affordable housing area. Completion of this required environmental review process means these programs are closer to our goal, which is to develop more housing for workforce-level income families. This is great news for Mississippi’s Gulf Coast,” Governor Barbour said.

Because the programs are included in a comprehensive \$5 billion recovery in federal funds appropriated to Mississippi for hurricane recovery and rebuilding efforts, they are subject to federal guidelines, which include undergoing an Environmental Review and Compliance Process. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, led by Chief, or “Mike,” Beasley Denson, was the last of various groups to sign off on the programs as part of the process.

Environmental concerns, such as disturbing Choctaw burial grounds, were evaluated before a final decision was made by the Band of Choctaw Indians. After a complete study of the program and its mission, Mike Denson approved the plan on behalf of the Band of Choctaw Indians, indicating this program would have no adverse affect on the tribe’s burial grounds.

While the overall environmental review and compliance process is complete, specific individual sites may require reviews of their own. Even so, administrators are moving to full implementation of the program with 20 applications to be considered first under a pilot process.

As currently funded, the Small Rental Assistance Program will provide \$150 million in forgivable loans to owners of small rental properties to create more affordable rental housing for lower income and workforce-income level families.

Under the program, rental property owners must commit to rent to low-to-moderate income residents, with more than half of residents at 80% or less area median income. .

Elevation grants are designed to assist homeowners who are rebuilding their Katrina-damages homes and need to lift them out of the federally-identified flood zone.

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